

Association for the Study of African American Life and History

The New England Negro as Seen in Advertisements for Runaway Slaves

Author(s): Lorenzo J. Greene

Source: *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Apr., 1944), pp. 125-146

Published by: [Association for the Study of African American Life and History](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2715307>

Accessed: 22-10-2015 10:26 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Association for the Study of African American Life and History is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Negro History*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE NEW ENGLAND NEGRO AS SEEN IN ADVERTISEMENTS FOR RUNAWAY SLAVES

Numerous articles and monographs, good, bad and indifferent, have been written about the Negro slave. In these works, however, the authors have dealt mainly with the more familiar aspects of slavery, such as the occupations, treatment, and legal status of the slaves, together with certain phases of their social life. But upon the personality of the slave himself, very little light is thrown. Consequently, the reader, after perusing three or four hundred pages of heavily documented material, probably wonders: What kind of person was the Negro slave? What was his sex? What name, if any, did he bear? How tall was he? Was he husky, thin, or of average build? What was his complexion, the color of his eyes, the shape of his nose, the thickness of his lips? What was his particular job? What were his accomplishments? Could he speak English? Could he read and write? Whence did he come, where did he reside, and, if he ran away, what was his destination? How valuable was he to his master in terms of monetary reward offered for his return?

In this paper, an attempt will be made to answer some of these questions with particular reference to the New England runaway slave. Negro slavery was introduced into New England about 1638, when Captain William Pierce brought a cargo "of salt, cotton, tobacco and negroes" into Boston harbor.¹ Thereafter for a century and a half, slavery and the slave trade were legitimate institutions in colonial New England.² Limited, however, by economic and geographic factors, slavery never became widespread in New England, and the total number of Negroes at any given time

¹ John Winthrop, *History of New England, 1630-1649* (ed. James Kendall Hosmer), 2 vols. (New York, 1908), I, 260. For pertinent discussion of the New England slave trade, see Lorenzo J. Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776* (New York, 1942), ch. i.

² Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, p. 68 and *passim*.

never exceeded the approximate figure of 16,034 reached on the eve of the American Revolution.³ Slavery among the Puritans assumed a quasi-patriarchal aspect, consciously patterned by the Puritans after that of the ancient Hebrews.⁴ Slaves were considered part of their masters' family. Often they worked side by side with their owners, slept in the same house and ate at the same table with the master's family. As a result, the New England slave, generally speaking, never knew the extreme type of slavery to which the blacks of the West Indies and of the antebellum South were subjected.

Although the Negroes were relatively well-treated in New England, hundreds of them ran away from their masters.⁵ The latter, in turn, naturally sought to repossess their property by every lawful means at their disposal. The appearances of regular newspapers, beginning in 1704 with the *Boston News-Letter*,⁶ was a great boon to the masters who thereby had the means of advertising for their runaways, and thus increased the chances of recovering their chattels. Such was the frequency with which slaves escaped from their owners that nearly every issue of a New England newspaper between 1704 and 1784, carried advertisements for fugitive slaves.

Typical is the manner in which Thomas Jacques of Gloucester, Massachusetts, advertised in 1769 for his runaway slave, Titus:

Ran way from me the Subscriber of Gloucester, the first of this instant June, a Negro man named Titus, about 21 years of age, of a middle stature, stutters considerably when he speaks, and hath

³ Greene, *op cit.*, p. 74.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168 *et seq.*

⁵ The files of such newspapers as the *Boston News-Letter*, the *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, the *Boston Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, the *Connecticut Courant*, the *Newport Mercury*, the *New Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle*, and many other newspapers of colonial New England contain hundreds of advertisements for fugitive slaves.

⁶ Lyman H. Weeks and Edwin M. Bacon, *Historical Digest of the Provincial Press* (Boston, 1911), p. 34.

lost part of his great toe, on one foot; had on when he went away, a grey coat, a striped blue and white cotton and linen jacket with pewter buttons, a light blue pair of yarn stockings, a new pair of shoes, also wore away a felt hat. Whoever will take up said Negro, and him safely keep or convey to his said master shall have Eight Dollars Reward and all necessary charges paid by me the subscriber Thomas Jacques.⁷

These slave advertisements, of which the foregoing is an excellent example, offer abundant testimony of an unconscious nature upon the personality of the New England slave. In them the historian may find valuable bits of information bearing upon the nomenclature, age, sex, stature, complexion, physical traits, personal traits, personal accomplishments and many other characteristics of the slave as a person. Unlike the slave dealer, who, in advertising, employed all the subterfuges of high-pressure salesmanship in order to dispose of his wares,⁸ the owner of the runaway probably gave as honest and precise a description of his slave as possible, on the theory that the more forthright the description, the greater the possibility of recovering his property. For this reason, advertisements for runaway slaves are a mine of invaluable information—information which, when collected, analyzed and synthesized, affords an otherwise unobtainable picture of the slave personality.

In an effort to portray, in so far as it is possible to do so, the personality of the New England runaway, sixty-two advertisements for fugitive slaves are herein analyzed. These notices were carefully selected from more than one hundred, collected by the writer in the course of his researches on *The Negro in Colonial New England*. These advertisements were taken from eleven eighteenth century newspapers published in the various New England colonies

⁷ *Boston Chronicle*, June 22, 1769, p. 200.

⁸ For examples of advertisements offering Negroes for sale, see Greene, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-43.

or states.⁹ In point of time, the sixty-two advertisements under consideration cover a period of sixty-four years, from 1718 to 1784.

It is clear that from such an obviously arbitrary and inadequate sampling as these sixty-two advertisements represent no definitive conclusions regarding the personality of the New England slave can be drawn. Such generalizations as may be later set forth must, of necessity, be regarded as purely tentative. Nevertheless an analysis of this sampling, although admittedly defective, can do much to point out the rich possibilities inherent in a more definitive study of this kind.

The sixty-two runaways under consideration came from a total of thirty-seven different towns located in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.¹⁰ Thirty-two, or about half of the total fugitives, came from seventeen Massachusetts towns. Boston alone, which was said to contain 1,374 Negroes in 1742,¹¹ furnished fifteen or nearly half of the Massachusetts runaways. Five of the escaped slaves represented three New Hampshire towns, while six Rhode Island towns each supplied one runaway. Connecticut, which in 1774 had the largest population in New England (6,464),¹² furnished eighteen runaways, who

⁹ Among these newspapers were the *Boston News-Letter*, the *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, the *Boston Gazette or Weekly Advertiser*, the *Connecticut Courant* and *Weekly Intelligencer*, the *Connecticut Gazette and Universal Intelligencer*, the *Newport Mercury*, and the *New Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle*.

¹⁰ Massachusetts runaways came from such towns as Billingham, Roxbury, Exeter, Berwick, Leominster, Marlborough, Deerfield, Waltham, Dorchester, Halifax, Watertown, Gloucester, Kittery, Ipswich, Bridgewater, and Cambridge; New Hampshire fugitives came from Portsmouth, Durham and Somers; Hopkinton, South Kingstown, Newport, Boston-Neck, Tiverton and Cape Fear supplied the Rhode Island runaways; while Hartford, New Hartford, Norwich, Westfield, Colchester, Byfield, Noblestown, Lyme, Sharon and Middletown accounted for the Connecticut fugitives.

¹¹ *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, third series, I, 152; Greene, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

¹² *Connecticut Colonial Records*, XIV, 491.

escaped from a total of eleven towns. From Hartford, whose Negro population in that year was outranked only by New London,¹³ came five fugitives.

Of the total runaways under consideration, only four had served masters in other localities. Jim, who ran away from his Westfield, Connecticut, master in 1780, had formerly been the property of one Isaac Jones of New Haven in the same colony;¹⁴ Prince, a Hartford fugitive of the same year, had once served an anonymous owner at Lyme, Connecticut;¹⁵ Primus, fleeing in 1768 from a Boston slaveholder was formerly owned by the Reverend Mr. Coffin of Kingston, Massachusetts,¹⁶ and Sarah, a Boston runaway in 1776, had seen servitude in both Providence, Rhode Island, and Concord, Massachusetts.¹⁷

As to the birthplace of the runaways, little information was found. Only three masters revealed where their slaves were born. One Negro was a native of the Spanish West Indies;¹⁸ another was born in Boston;¹⁹ and the third was vaguely said to have been "born in this country,"²⁰ which, of course, could mean New England or any other English mainland colony.

The names borne by these slaves appear to fall into at least four categories: classical, Hebrew, Christian (English), and African. Only ten masters failed to give the names of their slaves. Since the Puritans were mainly of English stock, English names, as might be expected, predominated. Hence twenty-two slaves bore such Christian,

¹³ For Negro population of Connecticut towns in 1774, see *ibid.*, 483-492; Greene, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

¹⁴ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, August 22, 1780.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, May 2, 1780.

¹⁶ *Boston News-Letter*, August 4, 1768.

¹⁷ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, August 28; September 12, 1782.

¹⁸ *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, September 25, October 16, 1749.

¹⁹ *New England Weekly Journal*, January 31, 1738.

²⁰ *Boston News-Letter*, August 4, 1768.

or place names, as Dick, Nanny, Bell, Jim, Jack, Violet, Frank, London, and Newport.²¹ Reflecting the classical tradition of the times, and also probably expressive of the masters' sense of humor or ridicule, nineteen slaves carried Latin and Greek names. Some of them bore the high-sounding names of illustrious Roman statesmen like Cato,²² or the cognomen of great soldiers like Pompey and Caesar,²³ one carried the name of the Roman emperor, Titus,²⁴ and two slaves, Neptune and Sylvia, were named after gods of classical mythology.²⁵ Primus, Felix, and Prince further illustrate the seemingly derisive humor of the masters in naming their slaves.²⁶ Prince seemed to be a favorite slave cognomen, for more slaves (five in all) bore this name than any other.²⁷ The influence of the Hebrew tradition in New England was apparent in such slave names as Sarah, Jonathan, Zil, Shubal, and Moses.²⁸ Four other slaves bore what appeared to be African names, to wit, Quom, Cloe,

²¹ *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, May 11, 1767; *New England Weekly Journal*, January 31, 1736; *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, April 10; September 25; October 16, 1749; *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 5, 12; November 14, 1776; June 5; October 30, 1777; *Connecticut Gazette and Universal Intelligencer*, August 22, 1780; *New England Chronicle*, May 9, 1776.

²² *New Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle*, June 19, 1767.

²³ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, November 14, 1776; *Boston News-Letter*, August 4, 1768; *ibid.*, July 24, 1749.

²⁴ *Boston Chronicle*, June 22, 1769. Sometimes Titus was abbreviated to "Tite." *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, August 3, 1779.

²⁵ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, August 25, 1778; *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, August 28, 1777.

²⁶ *Boston News-Letter*, August 4, 1768; *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, March 12, 1777; *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, September 25; October 2, 16, 1749; *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, August 13, 20, 27; October 15, 1778.

²⁷ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, August 13, 20, 27; October 15, 1778; *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, September 25, 1749; *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, May 2, 1780.

²⁸ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 12, 1782; *Newport Mercury*, May 25, 1772.

Coffe, and Bandong.²⁹ Slaves rarely enjoyed the luxury of surnames, but at least five of them did so. Sarah Seheter, Jonathan White, Shubal Lawrence, Moses Perry, and John Baptize were the notable exceptions.³⁰

The ages of approximately two-thirds of the sixty-two runaways were given. These ages ranged from fifteen to fifty years, which superficially might be interpreted to mean that the New England slave was comparatively young. When broken down, the age of the fugitives tended to show considerable positive correlation between youth and the desire to break away from servitude. Flight, with reasonable prospects of freedom, seemed to appeal most strongly to the younger slaves, who could better endure the hardships which running away entailed. Hence it is not surprising that two-thirds of the runaways whose ages were given were twenty-five years of age and under. To emphasize this point further, of the total runaways, more than five-sixths were thirty-five and under. Only five of the fugitives were between the ages of thirty-five and fifty, and of these only one was as old as fifty.

Not only age but the season of the year chosen for escape seemingly weighted the scales either in favor of, or against, the chances of successful flight. In colonial New England, where the summers were short and the winters long and severe, the factor of season was especially important. Apparently, the slaves realized the necessity of having the weather in their favor, for the advertisements show that forty-one, or roughly two-thirds of the fugitives, chose warm or hot weather for absconding. A favorite period seems to have been June to August inclusive, during which time twenty-one, or one-third of the total fugitives

²⁹ *Boston Gazette or Weekly Advertiser*, May 14, 1754; *New England Weekly Journal*, October 10, 17, 1738; *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 19, 1776.

³⁰ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 12, 1782; *Newport Mercury*, May 25, 1772; July 3, 1734; *Boston Gazette or Weekly Advertiser*, May 21, 1754.

fled. Almost equally favorable was the three-month span between September and November inclusive, when twenty slaves ran away. But the most desirable season was probably late summer and fall (August to November inclusive) which accounted for half (thirty-one) of the runaways. Escape during this period was probably facilitated by ripening harvests of fruits, vegetables and nuts while hay and fodder stacks afforded shelter by night. In marked contrast with the number of escapes during the milder seasons of the year is the record of flights for the months of December, January, and February—the season of heavy snow-fall and ice. The record shows that during this period only five slaves attempted to escape. Only one slave had the hardihood to run away in December, but, surprisingly enough, January and February each showed two fugitives. Since ordinarily the severest part of the New England winter falls in January and February, a larger and better sampling might reveal that a minimum number of escapes occurred during these months.

Analyzed as to sex, runaways were overwhelmingly male. Of the sixty-two fugitives under consideration, only eight were women or girls, while fifty-four were men or boys. These figures are not surprising when one considers the fact that not only did male slaves generally outnumber the females, but that the latter probably found successful escape more hazardous than the males. Furthermore, as houseworkers mainly, Negro women fell under the closer surveillance of the thrifty Puritan housewife, hence had fewer opportunities to escape than the men whose work frequently kept them out of doors.

Respecting other physical characteristics of the slaves, details are seldom precise. Especially is this true regarding the height of the runaways. Probably most masters, themselves, were too vague on this point to hazard a guess. At any rate, only eight of sixty-two owners ventured to

give the approximate height of their fugitive chattels. Judged from their estimates, the slaves ranged in height from five feet to five feet ten inches. The average height was roughly five feet six inches. Six other owners vaguely described their missing slaves as of "middling stature,"³¹ "middle stature,"³² or "of a middling size."³³ No data as to the weight of the slaves were given, and only eighteen advertisements afforded any information on the build of the runaways. On the basis of this incomplete evidence, eleven Negroes appeared to be what today would probably be called "husky." To the masters, however, the men were variously described as "well set,"³⁴ "pretty thick set,"³⁵ "middling sized,"³⁶ "thick, square set,"³⁷ "stout, lusty,"³⁸ or "short and thick set."³⁹ Of the women, one was pictured as "tall and slim";⁴⁰ Zil, a fifteen year old girl, was described as "small for her age,"⁴¹ and Sarah was portrayed as "a short, thick wench."⁴²

If masters had difficulty ascertaining the build and height of their slaves, they fared even worse when they tried to describe the color of their chattels. Even when the slave was black, the perplexed owner was not certain what shade of black he was. Hence a Negro evincing little or no trace of racial crossing might be called a "black";⁴³ another "a palish black";⁴⁴ a third "a yellowish black";⁴⁵ a

³¹ *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, September 25, October 2, 16, 1749.

³² *Boston News-Letter*, April 21, 1718.

³³ *New Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle*, June 19, 1767.

³⁴ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 19, 1776.

³⁵ *New England Weekly Journal*, October 24, 1738.

³⁶ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, March 14, 1780.

³⁷ *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, September 25, October 16, 1749.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, August 14, 1749.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, July 24, 1749.

⁴⁰ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, November 14, 1776.

⁴¹ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, March 9, 1779.

⁴² *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 25, 1777.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, August 13, 1778.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, September 19, 1776.

⁴⁵ *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, November 23, 1767.

fourth "very black,"⁴⁶ and a fifth "a very deep black."⁴⁷ Evidence of considerable miscegenation, a thing common in colonial New England,⁴⁸ is also borne out by these advertisements. Eleven, or more than one-sixth of the runaways, were designated as mulattoes;⁴⁹ while one master, in apparent despair, simply described the complexion of his slave as "not the darkest or lightest for a Negro."⁵⁰ At a time when such terms as "sepia," "high yellow," "yellow," "teasing brown," "golden brown," and "olive brown," commonly in use today to designate various degrees of racial mixture, were not currently employed, the eighteenth century master might be pardoned if he found it difficult to indicate more precisely the color of his slave. Possibly to avoid this pitfall, two-thirds of the masters made no attempt to describe the complexion of their runaways.

Masters were not much more successful in describing the physical features of their slaves. To say that the eighteenth century master operated on the oft-quoted saying that "all Negroes look alike" or that he simply lacked the ability to describe more accurately the features of his slave, would of course be combining facetiousness with speculation. Nevertheless, only five masters attempted to portray the features of their fugitives. And even these paid little attention to the color of the eyes, the shape of the nose or the size and shape of the mouth; consequently, the meagre information set forth probably proved of little value in apprehending the runaway. The best clue to the identi-

⁴⁶ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, April 20, 1779.

⁴⁷ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, October 30, 1777.

⁴⁸ Greene, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-203.

⁴⁹ For convenient summary of miscegenation in colonial New England, see Greene, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-210. For mulatto runaways see *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, May 26, 1778; *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 12, 1782; *Newport Mercury*, May 11, 25, 1772; see also files of other New England newspapers cited herein.

⁵⁰ *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, September 25; October 2, 16, 1749.

fication of one slave was that he had "very thick lips,"⁵¹ and another was said to have "a curled head of hair."⁵² Sometimes the efforts of the masters to describe the features of their slaves bordered upon the ludicrous. For instance, Quom was to be identified by a "wrinkled face, a mouth full of teeth and a large eye which he turns up when he is earnest in speaking";⁵³ an anonymous runaway had a "small head and a nose pitted on the end by the small-pox,"⁵⁴ and Cloe could be identified by her "flat face, blubber lips, and large mouth."⁵⁵

The advertisements show that twenty, or roughly one-third of the runaways, had physical defects of some kind. These imperfections included moles, scars, brands, deformities, impaired vision, and loss of limb. While of great value in effecting the identification and apprehension of the slaves, these defects also show that, excluding accidents, some of the slaves may have suffered harsh punishments at the hands of their masters. Whereas Robin, a Boston runaway, bore a "whitish spot" on the forehead between his eyes,⁵⁶ Pegg had "a small mole on her neck."⁵⁷ Two other slaves had been branded on the forehead with the letter "B."⁵⁸ Since the name of neither master began with that letter, the branding may have been done by a former owner.⁵⁹ On the other hand it may have been imposed as

⁵¹ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, August 3, 1779.

⁵² *Boston Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, May 21, 1754.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, May 14, 1754.

⁵⁴ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, April 20, 1779.

⁵⁵ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 19, 1776.

⁵⁶ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, June 5, 1777.

⁵⁷ *New England Weekly Journal*, October 24, 1738.

⁵⁸ One of the slaves was reported to wear his cap over his forehead in order to hide the scar. *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, August 14, 1749; *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, May 11, 1767.

⁵⁹ The names of the owners were John Read and Daniel Goodhue. However, one of the slaves was named John Baptize and the "B" might have stood for his surname.

punishment for a crime, such as bastardy. Six fugitives bore scars which may have resulted from beatings. Dick carried a mark on his left arm above the elbow where he had been cut by an ax;⁶⁰ Neptune bore scars on his knees;⁶¹ and Shubal had a scar on his upper lip that resembled a figure "3."⁶² Five other slaves were scarred in various degrees with pock-marks resulting from small-pox.⁶³ One slave was so deformed that when he bent over the small of his back was said to stick up "as if it had been broken."⁶⁴ Several of the runaways had suffered loss of eyes, legs, toes or fingers. Cyrus had lost an eye, in reference to which the record states: his "right eye is perished."⁶⁵ Five slaves had lost all or some of their toes either by freezing or other means. According to his Connecticut master, Robin had the "toes of each foot froze off,"⁶⁶ and Titus, a Massachusetts runaway, had lost "part of his great toe on one foot."⁶⁷ Not only did the aforementioned Neptune have both knees scarred, but, in addition, he had lost most of his toes, and the remaining parts of two toes on one foot had grown together.⁶⁸ Tragedy and comedy stalked through the advertisement for Caesar who, although having no legs, nevertheless was "supposed to be strolling about the country."⁶⁹

Along with these physical defects twenty, or roughly

⁶⁰ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Advertiser*, July 7, 1778.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, July 7, 1754.

⁶² *Boston Gazette or Weekly Advertiser*, May 21, 1754.

⁶³ Incidentally, these pock-marks are the only reference to disease suffered by slaves, of which smallpox was probably the most widespread and virulent. *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, March 12, 1777; *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, August 26, 1778; April 20, 1779; *New England Weekly Journal*, October 24, 1738.

⁶⁴ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, December 14, 1779.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, June 6, 1776.

⁶⁶ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, November 17, 1775.

⁶⁷ *Boston Chronicle*, June 22, 1769.

⁶⁸ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, August 25, 1778.

⁶⁹ *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, August 24, 1769.

one-third of the runaways, possessed peculiar personal traits by which the masters hoped they could be identified. In the case of six slaves, the tell-tale characteristics were to be found in their speech. Of these, three stuttered;⁷⁰ one spoke rapidly;⁷¹ another spoke slowly,⁷² and the sixth spoke "faint and slow."⁷³ Prince and Pomp were described as loquacious, or as the master of Pomp put it, he "is much for talking."⁷⁴ White runaways received similar comments, one master stigmatizing his indentured servant as one who "talks much but has little sense."⁷⁵ However, these runaways seemed to be a serious-minded lot, for only one Negro was cited as being humorous or "funny."⁷⁶ On the other hand, Prince was branded as a talkative and "saucy"⁷⁷ fellow, and another slave was said to be "very surly."⁷⁸ Three others were to be identified by their peculiar hair styles. Jack was said to have had the hair cut from the top of his head;⁷⁹ an anonymous fugitive had meticulously shaved his forehead in a certain manner;⁸⁰ and Jack, a Boston runaway, was vaguely said to have "the wool on his head combed in taste."⁸¹ Cloe evidently evinced considerable interest in her personal attire, for according to her master, she was generally "well dressed."⁸² On the debit side, at least from the owner's viewpoint, two fugi-

⁷⁰ *Boston Chronicle*, June 22, 1769; *New England Weekly Journal*, October 24, 1738.

⁷¹ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 19, 1776.

⁷² *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, September 25, 1749.

⁷³ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, March 14, 1780.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, May 2, 1780; *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, November 14, 1767.

⁷⁵ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, May 5, 1777.

⁷⁶ *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, November 23, 1767.

⁷⁷ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Advertiser*, May 2, 1780.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, August 3, 1779.

⁷⁹ *Connecticut Gazette and Country Journal*, November 23, 1767.

⁸⁰ *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, November 23, 1767.

⁸¹ *New England Chronicle*, May 9, 1776.

⁸² *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 19, 1776.

tives were classed as "crafty and subtle,"⁸³ the owner of one remarking that he knew how to "pretend sickness when well."⁸⁴ Zil, a fifteen year old Rhode Island fugitive, seems never to have considered herself a slave, for her master complained that "she pretends she is free."⁸⁵ Two other Negroes manifested a penchant for stealing,⁸⁶ and Cato was described as "a great lyer" and a "cunning" fellow to boot.⁸⁷

Fully as revealing as the personal traits of the slaves, is the light thrown by these advertisements upon the personal accomplishments of the runaways. For the most part, these skills were of a linguistic nature. Seventeen, or more than one-fourth of these slaves, could speak English. Although forty-five owners failed to indicate this skill in their slaves, it need not follow that they were unable to talk English. Of the seventeen described as speaking English, thirteen spoke "good English"; one spoke "pretty good English";⁸⁸ another "tolerable good English"⁸⁹ and two spoke "broken English."⁹⁰ Pomp apparently had served a Dutch master, for in addition to speaking broken English, he was said to use the Dutch language fluently.⁹¹ One of the runaways, designated as a Spanish Negro, apparently spoke Spanish.⁹² None of the fugitives, it seems, spoke French. From the advertisements, the runaways would appear to have been overwhelmingly illiterate, for all but one of the

⁸³ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, March 17, 1780; *New Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle*, June 19, 1767.

⁸⁴ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, March 14, 1780.

⁸⁵ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, March 9, 1779.

⁸⁶ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 12, 1775.

⁸⁷ *New Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle*, June 19, 1767.

⁸⁸ *Newport Mercury*, September 28, 1772.

⁸⁹ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, March 14, 1780.

⁹⁰ *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, September 25; October 16, 1749. *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, November 14, 1776.

⁹¹ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, November 14, 1776.

⁹² *Ibid.*

owners said nothing concerning the ability of their slaves to read and write. Whether these slaves were generally illiterate, or whether the masters apparently believed that literacy or lack of it in their slaves would have little to do with their recovery cannot be ascertained. Nevertheless, in view of the liberal attitude of the Puritans toward the education of their slaves,⁹³ it is surprising that only one of sixty-two runaways could read and write. The lone exception was Pegg, whose master claimed that she could "read and write well."⁹⁴ At least six slaves showed unusual musical ability, five of them playing the violin with varying degrees of excellence.⁹⁵ However, the master of Diamond, after stating that the slave was very proud of the violin which he had carried away, ruefully added that Diamond was a "miserable performer."⁹⁶

Although only five of the sixty-two masters revealed the occupations of their slaves, even this small number indicated the wide variety of tasks performed by the New England Negro. A runaway woman was a house servant;⁹⁷ Tite, a field worker;⁹⁸ Caesar, a shipyard worker;⁹⁹ Prince and Crispus Attucks, the first martyr of the American Revolution, were sailors;¹⁰⁰ an anonymous slave was an ironworker,¹⁰¹ and another a cooper.¹⁰²

Much more light is thrown upon the clothing of the run-

⁹³ Greene, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-244.

⁹⁴ *New England Weekly Journal*, October 24, 1738.

⁹⁵ *Boston News-Letter*, August 4, 1768; *Connecticut Gazette and Universal Intelligencer*, October 20, 1775; *Connecticut Gazette and Universal Advertiser*, March 22, 1776; June 7, 14, 21, 1777; *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, August 3, 1779; *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, September 25; October 2, 16, 1749.

⁹⁶ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, October 30, 1777.

⁹⁷ *New Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle*, February 13, 1767.

⁹⁸ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, August 3, 1779.

⁹⁹ *Boston Gazette or Weekly Journal*, February 2, 1748.

¹⁰⁰ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, August 6, 1778.

¹⁰¹ *Boston News-Letter*, August 4, 1718.

¹⁰² *Boston Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, January 15, 1754.

aways. Apparently believing that a full description of the clothing worn by the Negro at the time of his disappearance would make for the speedier apprehension and recovery of their property, twenty-six, or nearly half of the owners, gave information on this point. If the attire of these run-aways can be accepted as indicative of the general situation, the New England slave was relatively well-clothed. Thus when the slave of a Connecticut master ran away in May, 1778, he was dressed in

a pair of pumps that had been soled,
and a pair of plated buckles,
a good caster hat and a poor felt
hat, a check'd flannel shirt and
one of linnen and a coat and jacket
of mixed cloth (dark brown) and a
pair of breeches of the same material.¹⁰³

Upon fleeing her Boston master in August, 1777, Sylvia was more lightly clothed in "a red and white furniture-check gown and a black and white-striped, homespun petticoat."¹⁰⁴ By contrast, a January fugitive was clad in "a brownish drugget coat, a blue jacket, a speckled woolen shirt, old yarn stockings and a pretty good hat."¹⁰⁵ A cursory comparison of newspaper advertisements for run-away Negro slaves with those for white indentured servants tends to show that the Negroes were clothed as well as, and in some cases even better than, the white servants.¹⁰⁶

In addition to their own clothing, at least one-third of the slaves did not scruple to appropriate and carry away

¹⁰³ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, May 26, 1778.

¹⁰⁴ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, August 28, 1777.

¹⁰⁵ *New England Weekly Journal*, January 31, 1738.

¹⁰⁶ When Thomas Greely ran away from his Shrewsbury, Massachusetts master in February, 1770, he was dressed in "an old fustian coat, tore in the elbows, a woolen shirt, collar lined with white cotton, a brown waistcoat, leather apron, blue pair of leggings, a pair of old leather breeches, and a pair of old shoes." *Boston Chronicle*, February 5, 8, 1770. For similar advertisements, see Greene, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

with them personal property belonging to their masters. Among these articles were clothing, guns, money, and violins. Probably realizing that their own clothing was insufficient, or desiring to change in order to avoid detection, five of the runaways helped themselves to extra clothing. For example, a Boston fugitive took from her owner :

a checked cotton and linen shirt
two fine Garlick Shirts, a large
Greatcoat of a brownish color
with large flat metal Buttons,
a pair of men's sharp toed calf-
skin shoes, and a pair of new
Steel Buckles.¹⁰⁷

The master warned that she would likely change to man's attire.¹⁰⁸ More typical probably was Constant, who, in addition to the clothing he was wearing, appropriated "a light blue Duroy Coat and a pair of check plush Breeches."¹⁰⁹ Four runaways took violins belonging to their masters.¹¹⁰ Another took both violin and clothing,¹¹¹ and a slave woman is vaguely reported by her exasperated owner to have carried off "sundry things of value."¹¹² When Prince, a Boston fugitive, fled, he helped himself not only to his master's wardrobe, but also to the latter's gun and a violin.¹¹³ Coffe, who ran away from a New Hampshire minister in 1738, not only had a wardrobe which would have been the envy of many free white persons of that time, but, in addition, he took from his master a gun and several pounds in money. As the minister detailed them, Coffe appropriated

¹⁰⁷ *New England Weekly Journal*, October 24, 1738.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Boston Gazette or Weekly Advertiser*, January 28, 1775.

¹¹⁰ *Connecticut Gazette and Universal Intelligencer*, October 20, 1775; March 22, 1776; *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, August 3, 1779; *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, October 30, 1777.

¹¹¹ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, May 8, 1777.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, September 12, 1782.

¹¹³ *Boston Weekly Post Boy*, September 25, 1749.

..... a plain Cloth Coat of a brownish Colour with brass Buttons, another Coat, of a plain Cloth, being black and white with large Pewter Buttons, a jacket of blue Camblet, with two pairs of linnen Breeches, two pairs of Stockings, the one of black Worsted and another of white Cotton a pair of Yarn Leggings, a pair of round toed shoes (and) two Hatts, one of felt and another of Leather.¹¹⁴

It is difficult, in view of the chaotic currency of colonial New England, to say, with any degree of accuracy what premium the slaveowners placed upon the recovery of their runaways. With Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish coins, circulating simultaneously with English currency and colonial paper money, the value of colonial currency fluctuated so rapidly that the real amount of the reward was rarely constant.¹¹⁵ Hence, it is impossible to state the real value of the cash rewards promised for the return of fugitive slaves.

Nevertheless, all except seven masters offered cash payments for the recovery of their slaves, and also volunteered to pay all expenses incident to their apprehension and return. Cash rewards were paid either in terms of English pounds or Spanish dollars. In terms of pounds, eleven masters offered rewards ranging from six pence to £10. On the other hand, forty-one owners promised rewards in Spanish dollars, ranging from \$1.00 to \$500.¹¹⁶ However, because of unstable currency values, it would be pointless to attempt an average cash reward in either currency.

Of the eleven cash rewards in terms of pounds offered by the masters for the recovery of their runaways, eight

¹¹⁴ *New England Weekly Journal*, October 10, 17, 1738.

¹¹⁵ Davis Rich Dewey, *Financial History of the United States* (New York, 1936), pp. 20-21.

¹¹⁶ See table, p. 27.

were for sums ranging from £3 to £10. More than four-fifths of the rewards in Spanish currency fell into a bracket between \$4.00 and \$50.00.¹¹⁷ During the Revolution cash rewards skyrocketed as high as \$500.00. It must be borne in mind, however, that these amounts were in largely worthless continental currency. For instance, the \$500.00 which, in 1780, Jeremiah Platt of Hartford, Connecticut, offered for the recovery of his escaped slave, was worth, according to a Hartford newspaper, exactly \$12.50 in specie.¹¹⁸ In

TABLE

Amounts and Frequency of Cash Rewards Offered by Fifty New England Masters for the Return of their Runaway Slaves

Reward in Pounds		—Reward in Dollars—			
Amount	Frequency	Amount	Frequency	Amount	Frequency
4d	1	1.00	1	20.00	5
4s	1	2.00	1	30.00	1
1 Guinea	1	3.00	1	40.00	1
£3	1	4.00	4	50.00	3
£4	2	5.00	3	100.00	2
£5	1	6.00	5	150.00	1
£10	4	8.00	3	200.00	1
		10.00	7	300.00	1
				500.00	2

other words, though the amount seemed large, the value was small.

Some rewards seemed to bear little or no relation to the worth of the slave. Whether this was indicative of the master's inability to offer a larger reward, or whether he was indifferent to the recovery of his property can only be surmised. On the other hand, it might be interpreted, especially after 1775, as an awareness of the depreciation in

¹¹⁷ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, April 20, 1779; August 22, 29; September 5, 1780. *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, May 24, 1781.

¹¹⁸ *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, July 25, 1780.

slave property due to the rising abolitionist sentiment induced by the equalitarian philosophy of the American Revolution.¹¹⁹ Thus, while a Massachusetts master offered four dollars for a stout Negro boy of eighteen,¹²⁰ another promised only six pence for the return of a twenty-four year old man.¹²¹ The owner of a thirty-two year old Negro offered only four coppers for his recovery,¹²² yet another slave-owner would pay one dollar for the return of the legless but peripatetic Caesar.¹²³

According to the advertisements, very few masters had any idea of the probable destination of their runaways. Only ten slaveowners ventured an opinion on this point. Seven rural masters believed that their Negroes were bound for such towns as Providence, or Newport, Rhode Island; Salem, Lenox or Bridgewater, Massachusetts or even New York.¹²⁴ Reversing the order, an urban master surmised that his Negro had "gone to the country";¹²⁵ another believed that his slave had joined the British;¹²⁶ and an ex-

¹¹⁹ After 1763 when the colonies engaged in a political controversy with Great Britain over taxation, which was to lead to the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the natural right to liberty, on which the New Englanders based their demands for freedom, was applied by patriots, ministers and other leaders, to the slaves. The result was an antislavery crusade which by 1784 had effected the liberation of most of the Negroes in New England. *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*, I, 92. *New Hampshire State Papers*, IX, 896; *Acts and Resolves of the State of Rhode Island*, February, 1784—December, 1786 (Providence n. d.) X, 6-7; *Acts and Laws of the State of Connecticut* (New London, 1784) p. 235. *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, First Series, III, 203.

¹²⁰ *New England Chronicle*, May 9, 1776.

¹²¹ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, March 12, 1777.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, August 24, 1769.

¹²⁴ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 12, 1782; October 30, 1777; October 15, 1778; November 14, 1776; *Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer*, March 9, 1779; May 2, 1780.

¹²⁵ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 19, 1776.

¹²⁶ *Connecticut Gazette and Universal Intelligencer*, June 7, 1776.

asperated Roxbury master concluded that his "short thick wench" had joined her paramour, a free Negro in Boston.¹²⁷

These advertisements are not only enlightening for what they reveal, but they are also valuable for the things which they omit. Although in regard to marriage and sex relationships, New England slaves were bound by the same regulations as free white persons, nothing is said in these advertisements which might illuminate the marital condition of the runaways.¹²⁸ Nor is any mention made of their Christianization or the denomination to which they belonged, notwithstanding the fact that some slaves had been converted to the faith of their masters and belonged to the same church as their owners.¹²⁹ With the exception of petty stealing, the fugitives revealed no serious criminal tendencies. Likewise, is the record mute concerning the military service of these slaves, although Negroes fought in both the Colonial and Revolutionary wars.¹³⁰ Likewise, adversions to the health, initiative or to such moral qualities of the slaves as "honesty," "soberness," "goodness," so conspicuously played up by the slavedealer,¹³¹ are notably missing from the advertisements for runaways.

In the foregoing discussion an effort has been made to reveal the personality of the New England slave by analyzing and synthesizing bits of information taken from sixty-two advertisements for runaway Negroes. However, the picture outlined, because of the insufficient data upon which

¹²⁷ *Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, September 25, 1777.

¹²⁸ For discussion of this phase of New England slavery, see Greene, *op. cit.*, ch. viii.

¹²⁹ Greene, *op. cit.*, pp. 268ff.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-190.

¹³¹ *Boston News-Letter and New England Chronicle*, February 17, 1763. *Newport Mercury*, October 30; December 11, 1784; *Boston Gazette*, May 30, June 6, 1737; *New England Weekly Journal*, December 5, 1738; *Boston Gazette or Weekly Advertiser*, June 15, 1754. See also miscellaneous issues of above newspapers; also Greene, *op. cit.*, pp. 376-380.

the conclusions are based, is neither complete nor definitive. The inferences drawn, as already pointed out, are purely tentative and must be revised in light of a more adequate sampling of the data upon which the above generalizations are predicated. Such a study should pay rich dividends to the social historian interested in exploiting this relatively untouched phase of American Negro slavery.

LORENZO J. GREENE

Lincoln University
Jefferson City, Missouri